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A

SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE
CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF HEREFORD,

ON

THURSDAY, the Third of AUGUST, 1797,

AT THE

ANNUAL MEETING

OF

THE SUBSCRIBERS

TO

THE GENERAL INFIRMARY,

IN THAT CITY.

BY

JOHN DUNCUMB, A. M.

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TO
THE GOVERNORS AND FRIENDS
OF THAT
EXCELLENT INSTITUTION,
THE
HEREFORD GENERAL INFIRMARY,
THIS SERMON,
IS INSCRIBED,
WITH THE GREATEST RESPECT AND DEFERENCE,
BY
THEIR VERY HUMBLE SERVANT,

J. DUNCUMB.



A

S E R M O N.

LUKE X. 37.

—GO, AND DO THOU LIKEWISE.

THE universal benevolence which characterizes the Christian religion, is beautifully portrayed and illustrated in the circumstances which gave rise to this precept of our Saviour. It appears, that whilst this great teacher was explaining to the people of Decapolis, the nature of their obligations to God and to their neighbour, that one of his hearers asked him, “And who is my neighbour?”---The instruction contained in our Saviour’s reply, will lose none of its value from any suspicion of the motives which might lead to the enquiry; nor does the passage stand in need of any exposition to render it clear and perspicuous to the most common understanding: “A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came
where

where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow, when he departed, he took out two-pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him: and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was *neighbour* unto him that fell among the thieves? And the lawyer said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise."

In this instance, although the religion of the one was most essentially different from that of the other; and although the malevolence of the Jews was carried to so absurd an extent towards the Samaritans, that even acts of common intercourse were prohibited, and the woman at Jacob's well had expressed her surprise that our Saviour, "as a Jew, should ask water of her who was a woman of Samaria;"*---yet here natural humanity triumphed over every prejudice, and induced the Samaritan to relieve the wounded traveller. The comment of our Saviour on this conduct most pointedly instructed his followers, that the charity and benevolence of a Christian, are to be confined to neither sect nor situation, neither language nor country, but are to embrace within their limits all mankind.

* 1 John iv. 9.

The justice and value of many of the heathen maxims of morality are indisputable; and the sentiment of a Latin poet, "that as a man himself he felt a common interest in every thing which related to man,"* does honour to human nature. But the writings of their philosophers were not of sufficient authority to give effect to the morals they taught, nor to introduce into practice, the rules they recommended. Human means alone, were, perhaps, inadequate to so great an end: but how admirably was it afterwards effected, by the example and the doctrine of the author of Christianity. That amiable system applied as well to the reformation of manners, as to the improvement of morals: it was equally favourable to civil as to religious liberty; and it disseminated no principles, but such as were calculated to improve, adorn, and dignify our nature.

Attempts to depreciate this system, to undermine its authority, and to induce us to reject every thing in it which we have hitherto venerated, have, perhaps, been more open and frequent in this than in other periods; and if those only were affected, who are competent to decide on the subject, the cause of truth, in this as in every other case, must eventually have profited by the discussion it has introduced. The opinion of a distinguished character (now no more) in favour of the value, the im-

* Homo sum: humani nihil a me alienum puto.

Ter. Heaut. Act. 1 S. 1.

portance

portance and the authenticity of the Christian Scriptures, cannot fail to possess great weight in every impartial mind. His general knowledge and his accuracy of research, must have peculiarly qualified him for such an investigation: the strength and soundness of his judgement entitled his conclusions to credit; and his great proficiency in the original language in which they were composed, must have enabled him to have distinguished the truth, from the luxuriance of fancy, or the allegory of expression. The testimony alluded to, bears every external mark of sincere and genuine piety: "I have regularly and attentively perused the Holy Scriptures, and am of opinion, that independently of their divine origin, that volume contains more sublimity and beauty, more pure morality, more important history, and finer strains of poetry and eloquence, than can be collected from all other books, in whatever age or language they may have been composed."* To this may be added, the prophetic declaration of a distinguished Prelate, whose extensive erudition and ---above all---whose liberality of sentiment, do honour to his rank and situation. Replying to the arguments of a modern deist, whose writings have attracted considerable notice, he thus addresses him: "The Bible, Sir, has withstood the learning of Porphyry, and the power of Julian, to say nothing of the manichean Faustus; it has resisted the genius of Bolinbroke, and the wit of Voltaire; to say no-

* Sir William Jones.

thing of a numerous herd of inferior assailants---and it will not fall by your force.”*

Amongst other happy improvements, the first public institutions for the relief of the poor in cases of illness or accident, date their origin from the introduction of Christianity: nor is it unreasonable to suppose, that our Saviour's narrative of the compassionate Samaritan might have contributed to suggest and promote these truly charitable establishments. The Temple of Theseus, at Athens, in affording a sanctuary for distress of a different nature, perhaps approached the nearest to foundations of this kind before the Christian æra. But if Greece and Rome excelled in the splendor of their public edifices, later ages have the satisfaction of exceeding them, in the purposes to which they are applied; and as long as the preservation of mankind is deemed superior to their destruction, the Temple of Mars must not be compared with the Asylum for suffering humanity. Wherever the Christian doctrines have been taught and received, these institutions have been established with success. “Benevolence has ever been the distinguishing characteristic of Christianity, as opposed to every other denomination of men---Jews, Mahometans, or Pagans: In the times of the Apostles, and in the first ages of Christianity, it shewed itself in voluntary contributions for the relief of the poor and persecuted,

* Bishop Watson's Reply to Paine's Age of Reason, p.335.

the infirm and unfortunate: as soon as the church was permitted to have permanent possessions in land, and acquired the protection of the civil power, it exerted itself in the erection of hospitals of every kind; institutions these, of charity and humanity, which were forgotten in the laws of Solon and Lycurgus, and for even one example of which, the boasted annals of Pagan Rome will be explored in vain.”*

In some countries, a particular order of Laymen and Ecclesiastics exist, whose province it is to attend the sick and the poor, for the purpose of administering spiritual and temporal relief†: In this nation, we hope Christianity prevails in its purest form: here then, all its effects should appear in the most conspicuous light; and here we find, that in addition to the “legal provision for the poor, which was unknown and unthought of by the most polished nations of antiquity,”‡ the metropolis alone contains receptacles for almost every species of misfortune or distress, to which humanity is liable§. The fabrics which public virtue has thus reared in alleviation of private misery, not only proclaim the

* Bishop Watson’s Apology for Christianity, p. 126.

† They are called “Brothers of Charity,” and prevail in some of the countries subject to the see of Rome.

‡ Paley’s Philosophy.

§ Mr. Colquhoun, in his excellent Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis, recommends the institution of a public charity to afford employment to those persons who have been brought to public trial and acquitted.

benevolence, but constitute the ornaments of the country; and the residence of the Chief Magistrate of the realm is eclipsed in magnificence, by the mansions appropriated to the relief of disease and affliction. The same spirit of Christian philanthropy has pervaded the whole kingdom, and few provinces remain without their peculiar Infirmary or Hospital.

On brotherly kindness and charity in general, the Scriptures are perhaps more copious and explicit than on any other duty. Our Saviour called it "a new commandment," when he urged his followers "to love one another." St. Paul also described it with unusual minuteness; "Charity suffereth long and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself; is not puffed up; doth not behave itself unseemly; seeketh not her own; is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in truth; beareth all things; believeth all things; hopeth all things; endureth all things." He even appears to prefer it to every virtue: "though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, and have not Charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal: although I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and though I have all faith so that I could remove mountains, and have not Charity, I am nothing." To this it may be opposed, that the charity here alluded to, means
rather

rather a general spirit of love, extending both to God and our fellow-creatures, than to that particular branch which consists in relieving others; but St. James has written, “if a brother or sister be naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled, notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful for the body, what doth it profit?”* And this particular stress appears to be laid, because the benevolence recommended is not only that temper and disposition of mind, which is the highest improvement of our rational nature, but also because it is that temper and disposition which inclining us to do good and to take pleasure in doing it, constitutes the happiness of intellectual creatures. “The effect which these and similar precepts of Christianity, produced on some of its first converts, was such as might be expected from a divine religion coming with full force and miraculous evidence on the consciences of mankind. It overwhelmed all worldly considerations in the thoughts of a more important existence,”† and “the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul; neither said any of them, that ought of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things common.”‡

* James ii. 15 and 16.

† Paley’s Philosophy.

‡ Acts iv. 32.

In the elegant moral system of an Author* of the present day, it is concluded that “ the final cause for which compassion was appointed, is to afford to the miserable a remedy for those inequalities and distresses which God foresaw that many must be exposed to, under every general rule for the distribution of property.” And however severely this inequality may seem to press on a large portion of mankind, yet as creatures animated by his breath, and unable to resist his will ; as men endowed with all the valuable faculties of the mind, and as Christians, distinguished by the most eminent marks of God’s favour and mercy, our dependence---our reason---and our gratitude should teach us to respect what Providence has ordained. As Englishmen, we should more particularly acquiesce in this gradation ; not only from the circumstance that the higher ranks amongst us, form a branch of our constitution in its purest theory ; but also from the recollection, that their exertions, in various and critical periods of our history, have secured some of the most valuable privileges we enjoy ; and that, amongst the descendants of our ancient Nobility, are still found those, who add lustre to their birth, by acting as the champions of our liberties and the assertors of our rights. But the farther this dispensation is examined, the greater occasion shall we have to praise and to respect it. By these

* Paley.

distinctions,

distinctions, are formed and promoted, in a high degree, the intercourse of society, the comforts of life, and the security of every thing we possess. The effects of the Agrarian Law of Rome were not such as to induce its adoption by other nations, whether recurring to first principles, or trying the most speculative forms of government. Under such a system, carried to its full extent, each individual might in a greater or less degree have confined his fears and his wishes to himself; each might have lived in indifference or enmity with all around him; the lower offices of life, which are equally necessary as those attached to exalted situations, might have been despised and neglected; the Arts and Sciences, from the want of a free intercourse and exchange of ideas, might have made no progress; Civilization, from the same cause, would have been materially impeded; and superior sagacity would generally have extended its influence no farther than the narrow limits of its possessor's mind. But in our present situation, connected by our mutual wants, and necessitated to adopt an active intercourse, genius and ability may be exerted with the fullest effect, and benevolence may range in the widest sphere. With all the comforts of private friendship, how satisfactory is the recollection, that by mutual acts of kindness we promote a general welfare, by forming and cementing a general society; and that the interests of men are so interwoven, that public happiness

happiness can alone be composed of individual prosperity. Under this wise arrangement, the Christian doctrines have promoted and encouraged a spirit of private liberality, which has done peculiar honour to our own age and country; and the names of HOWARD and HANWAY cannot fail to be venerated, as long as philanthropy and virtue are thought worthy of esteem: men, whose lives and property were sincerely devoted to the relief of their fellow-creatures; whose cares extended to the lowest and most miserable classes of society; and whose researches penetrated the most sequestered, remote, or even loathsome situations. To a similar spirit, and to principles congenial with these, is to be ascribed the establishment of that benevolent institution, in the support of which we are now assembled. Amongst the Founders and Benefactors of this Charity, are enrolled names which we are accustomed to esteem and revere. “The important advantages of it are satisfactorily proved by the experience of twenty-one years, and the relief administered within that period to many thousands of sick poor;”^{*} and amidst the various recommendations to this mode of dispensing Charity, none are more obvious and forcible than the certainty that “a contribution goes farther towards attaining the

^{*} Report and Resolutions of the Governors, the 15th of June, 1797.

end for which it is given, than it can do by any private or separate beneficence.”*

To substitute hope for despair, to alleviate the poignancy of unexpected distress---to soothe affliction---and to administer comfort on the bed of despondency and sickness---are actions which every generous mind must feel a pleasure in performing: It is yours to distribute these blessings around you, and yours to enjoy the satisfactory result. Exposed as we all are, not only to natural infirmities, but to various and sudden calamities, which no human foresight can distinguish, nor human care prevent; how anxious should we be, to lighten the misery of those, who although differing from us in the means of comfort and relief, are still fellow-creatures with ourselves, formed of the same materials, possessed of the same feelings, and endowed with every property common to our nature. But, unfortunately, general arguments will not alone apply to the immediate subject of our consideration: “in the common course of nature, the Charity has been deprived of many of its best Benefactors; the general pressure of the times,” unparalleled in the history of this nation, “has also very considerably tended to the reduction of its income,”† and “we are informed, that without special and extraordinary aid, an institution of the most approved and extensive utility will be necessitated to

* Paley.

† Governors’ Address, &c.

abridge, if not wholly to discontinue its valuable assistance to that wretched class, who suffer the complicated evils of poverty and disease.”*

Thus are the objects of this Charity reduced to the situation of the unfortunate traveller described by our Saviour: shall we then imitate the unfeeling Priest, and refuse our assistance? Shall we, like the Levite, tamely look on, or pass by on the other side? Shall the apathy of the Stoic supersede the benevolence of the Christian? Shall cold indifference destroy that fabric which was reared by Sensibility, and dedicated to Virtue?

When cares assail us, when disorder enfeebles, when age enervates, then, when reflection will intrude, what can afford us more effectual comfort, than the consciousness of having administered it to others? Extend our views, and every argument is at once before us, which can animate our hopes, or alarm our apprehensions, in the most awful moment which ever can occur: when “the King shall say unto them on his right hand, come, ye blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world; for I was an hungred and ye gave me meat, I was thirsty and ye gave me drink, I was a stranger and ye took me in, naked and ye cloathed me: I was sick and ye visited me: I was in prison and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him saying, Lord, when

* Governors’ Address, &c.

saw we thee an hungred and fed thee, or thirsty and gave thee drink? when saw we thee a stranger and took thee in; or naked and cloathed thee? or when saw we thee sick or in prison and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it to one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”*

* Matthew xxv. 34.

END.